New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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1944 PRODUCTIONS

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Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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1944 PRODUCTIONS

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New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

1944

"Robin Hood"

Comic opera by Reginald deKoven; book by Harry B. Smith; revived and staged by R. H. Burnside for J. J. Shubert; settings by United Studios. Presented by Mr. Burnside at the Adelphi Theatre, November 7, 1944.

THE CAST

Robert of Huntington (afterward Robin Hood) ..... Robert Field
Sheriff of Nottingham ..... George Lipton
Sir Guy of Gisborne ..... Frank Farrell
Little John ..... Harold Patrick
Will Scarlett ..... Wilfred Glenn
Friar Tuck ..... Jerry Robbins
Allan-a-Dale ..... Edith Herlick
Lady Marian Fitzwalter ..... Barbara Scully
Dame Durden ..... Zamah Cunningham
Annabel ..... Margaret Spencer

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 8, 1944

'Robin Hood' Revived At Adelphi Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

ACTING for J. J. Shubert, R. H. Burnside's latter-day Bostonians give everything they've got to Reginald de Koven's "Robin Hood" at the redecorated and attractive Adelphi Theatre. This everything they've got works out well for the 53-year-old theatrical restoration, reproducing the "romantic comic opera" after the fashion set by Manhattan's first performance, which took place at the departed Standard Theatre in 33rd St. more than half a century ago.

Benjamin Harrison was President of the United States; the first electrocution for crime in New York State took place at Auburn; Ellis Island opened up as an Immigration Depot, while Castle Garden closed down; and a gentleman from Massachusetts threw a bomb at Russell Sage and blew himself to pieces just about the time "Robin Hood" was born. Putting the newspapers of Sept. 22, 1891, aside, it's not uninteresting to note that all these are gone, or practically forgotten.

All but "Robin Hood." For nowadays, in 54th St., the song-studded story of Robert of Huntington, Sir Guy of Gisborne and the Lady Marian Fitzwalter is cutting-up and carrying-on as if it were only half its age—if that!

Missing Mouse

Mr. Burnside's latter-day Bostonians are at their best when singing. So, for that matter, is the Harry B. Smith-Reginald de Koven operetta. The libretto, cut down to the bone, is, more frequently than not, long-drawn and unfunny. Especially when the players see fit to spoof it. Incidentally, I'll not soon forgive the director for removing the mouse—or was it a rat?—Friar Tuck used to catch by its tail and cast into the soup he was brewing. That, Mr. B., is sacrilege!

But the songs are fresh and lilting. In the second and middle-stanza, the act from which the rat—or is it a mouse?—is missing, one melody follows close upon another. Each is memorable. "It Takes Nine Tailors to Make a Man," "Brown October Ale," "Oh Promise Me," "The Tinker Song," "See the Little Lambkins Play," "The Forest Song," "Robin Hood's "Serenade" and the finale which really completes the afternoon or evening. These are worth hearing and rehearing.

Suppose several of them are derivative, several others of them are not-quite Gilbert and Sullivan. They are, at the same time, lovely and familiar, winningly nostalgic. I'm happy that Mr. Shubert, by way of Mr. Burnside, has revived them.

Pleasant! Pleasant!

Harold Patrick, equally at home on the diamond at the Yankee Stadium or the stage of The Town Hall, is a splendid Little John. His rendition of "Brown October Ale" is something to bring you hurrying to the Adelphi. I've seen and heard him in the Paper Mill Playhouse at Millburn, N. J., but not to greater advantage than in "Robin Hood" as brought once more to life in 54th St. Robert Field's performance in the title role is scarcely less impressive. He's good.

George Lipton's Sheriff of Nottingham is overdone. After all, Savoyian as he may be, the sheriff is the sheriff, "The Mikado" is "The Mikado." Barbara Scully, America's youngest prima donna, is a personable and far-seeing Maid Marian. The riding costume she wears is at least 300 years ahead of its time. Her voice is sweet, her personality winning. Likewise for Edith Herlick as Allan-a-Dale.

The backgrounds are fresh and colorful, with new awnings in Nottingham, new trees in Sherwood Forest and now wisecracks in the Courtyard of the Sheriff's Castle. "Robin Hood" is pleasant to see, pleasant to hear, pleasant to remember. But I do miss that mouse, rat or what-was-it!

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 8, 1944

Robin Hood Revival Dull

By BURTON RASCOE

REGINALD de Koven's romantic comic opera, Robin Hood, first produced in Chicago in 1890 and last revived on Broadway in 1931, was reintroduced by R. H. Burnside at the Adelphi last night.

This seems an error of judgment. A typical beer hall or summer garden operetta of the 90s and around the turn of the century, it is now so draggy, spiritless and old-fashioned that there can be little hope for it except in the matinee trade. The first-night customers walked out on it in droves last night.

The only reason now for seeing the show is the presence therein of Barbara Scully in the role of Maid Marian. She is one of the stage's most beautiful young women, and her voice is enchanting. The feminine contingent of the chorus is not only unusually pretty but with unusually good voices. But Miss Scully's support is otherwise without distinction.

Staged by Mr. Burnside, there is no animation to the performance; the comic interludes are heavy-handed, and the De Koven score now seems singularly uninspired.

The book and orchestration are in the original form; the book by the late Harry B. Smith; orchestra under the direction of Roger P. Vene; scenery by United Studios; costumes by Veronica. Besides Miss Scully, the principals are Robert Field, George Lipton, Frank Farrell, Harold Patrick, Wilfred Glenn, Jerry Robbins, Edith Herlick, Zamah Cunningham and Margaret Spencer.

NEW YORK SUN
November 8, 1944

De Koven's 'Robin Rood,' Sturdy Campaigner, Starts New Run at Adelphi Theater

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ON election night, "Robin Hood," that sturdy old campaigner, became a candidate for public favor again on Broadway. It is running this time under the campaign management of R. H. Burnside, who has devoted effective efforts in the past toward keeping the old favorites among the operatic classics in the limelight.

An audience at the opening in the Adelphi Theater which included many of a generation of playgoers that had grown up since the Reginald De Koven-Harry B. Smith operetta was last offered here, in 1932, voted by encores for the well known and well loved songs. Once more, the dashing Robin, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet and their associates went through their routines to the accompaniment of a large orchestra and chorus.

The songs, which again won a following, included, of course, "Oh, Promise Me," "My Dream Has Come True," "The Armorer's Song" and "Brown October Ale." Robert Field is Robin in this production; Barbara Scully, Maid Marian; Wilfred Glenn, Will Scarlet. As Little John, Mr. Burnside has Harold Patrick, and as the Sheriff and Sir Guy, George Lipton and Frank Farrell.

In his revival, suitably costumed, Mr. Burnside has put the accent on the musical score, which probably is where the accent should be.

NEW YORK POST
November 8, 1944

De Koven's 'Robin Hood' Revived—Without Horses

By WILELLA WALDORF

ACCORDING to the program at the Adelphi Theatre last night, R. H. Burnside is reviving Reginald de Koven's "Robin Hood" in its original form, as played by the famous Bostonians.

Precisely what this means it is difficult to say. If Mr. Burnside is suggesting that the original 1890 production was no better than the one at the Adelphi, it amounts to something of a slur on the Good Old Days. On the other hand, he may mean simply that no animals are involved in this version. The last time the opera was presented here, twelve years ago, Sherwood Forest was invaded by spirited horses and a pack of hounds, with definitely hilarious results.

The de Koven score is chiefly a score for male voices and it is not, therefore, particularly surprising that the men of the cast make more impression than the women. Robert Field, Harold Patrick and Wilfred Glenn do some capable shouting and rumbling, with Barbara Scully tossing in a coloratura passage now and then, but the general effect is hardly inspiring and the comedy is obviously designed for juvenile enjoyment only. At that, all of the children we know are far too sophisticated to think any of it very funny.

If the company is strong on anything, it's encores. The old tunes are all there—"I Am the Sheriff of Nottingham," "Oh, Promise Me," "The Forest Song," "Brown October Ale," "The Tinker Song," "See the Little Lambkins Play," etc., etc. — and they're promptly repeated before the audience has a chance to applaud. If it does applaud, they're repeated some more. One of these evenings somebody is going to get reckless and shout "Bravo!" and they'll probably go back and give the whole opera again.

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE
November 8, 1944

For the Records

By HOWARD BARNES

ON this particular Nov. 8 a review of Reginald De Koven's antique comic opera, "Robin Hood," must be more or less a matter of record. Let it be said, then, that the musical score is still lovely and that the libretto offers a better challenge for a fine operetta production than R. H. Burnside and the Shuberts have accepted. The Adelphi Theater offering is supposed to be "in its original form, as played by the famous Bostonians." The famous Bostonians must certainly have done a better job.

* * *

For "Robin Hood" is something of a natural in its field of musical make-believe.

"Robin Hood"—continued

The basic plot may not have a great deal of theatrical quality, but it is always a colorful background for the sing-song. The melodies are as gracious as anything that our theater has in escrow from the '90s. Unfortunately, the current revival plays hob with script and music, conjuring up little more than fugitive reminders of a famous light opera show. "Oh, Promise Me," "Brown October Ale," and "The Serenade" are songs which ride right through perfunctory performance, but they deserve something more than slip-shod delivery.

• • •

One suspects that the whole project was inspired by the recent popularity of operetta revivals, without much attention to the specific enterprise. There is a lot of phony handshaking at the Adelphi; mugs are waved around with no regard to whether or not they might be filled, and a couple of comics make a lamentable attempt to be funny. Since the voices are far from superior and are rarely in tune with the orchestra, the production can be set down as a rather sorry exhumation of a solid show.

• • •

The ensemble singing is by far the best in "Robin Hood." The sextet, "See the Little Lambkins Play," is delightful, and there are several duets, with Robert Field as Robin Hood and Barbara Scully as Maid Marian, which are worth listening to. Far too frequently there are encores for musical numbers which never become properly projected across the footlights. The physical production, incidentally, is seedy. "Robin Hood" is good enough to make one want to see a first-class revival of the operetta. It is not good enough to constitute a satisfactory entertainment.

NEW YORK TIMES
November 8, 1944

Brown October Ale

By LEWIS NICHOLS

R. H. BURNSIDE, who conducts a sort of one-man campaign to keep the operettic classics alive, turned his attention to "Robin Hood" last evening at the Adelphi. This is the Reginald de Koven-Harry B. Smith tale of Robin, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlett and the others, and it has not been revived here since 1932. A new generation of theatregoers has come to Broadway in the last dozen years, and it will find on Fifty-fourth Street a good score of pleasant music, nice singing, suitable costumes—and some of the worst comedy and acting imaginable. Mr. Burnside has put on an honest attempt to stress the music, but if he had ridden harder over his actors he would have had a better show.

• • •

"Robin Hood" is fifty-four years old now, and no doubt half a century ago they were saying that the operetta's book is not its best point. The local company is noting the fact that the production is in the original form, as given by the Bostonians in 1890. There are such lines as "a glass of new-laid milk," which do not settle too well these days. There also are comedians who can make the most of their opportunities to say such lines. "Robin Hood's" first act, which is almost dialogueless, is the best; the second, where almost everyone on the stage has an opportunity to misbehave, is long and incredibly tedius. The dialogue and the clowning intrude on a good score like the commercial announcements of radio, and even the fact that the production observes its museum quality does not help.

However, "Robin Hood" has its bright side. It includes among its numbers the world's drinking song, "Brown October Ale," and its wedding song, "Oh! Promise Me." There also are "The Tinkers' Song," "My Dream Has Come True," "The Armorer's Song" and others. To sing them, Mr. Burnside has Barbara Scully as an attractive and pleasant Maid Marian, Harold Patrick as Little John, Wilfred Glenn as Will Scarlett, Robert Field as Robin. The orchestra is large and knows its job, and the chorus can sing agreeably enough. George Lipton and Frank Farrell have the parts of the Sheriff and Sir Guy, and last evening they seemed far less funny than they must have seemed elsewhere.

A series of encores of the well-known songs slowed down the evening considerably. That can be fixed with firmness.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 8, 1944

'Robin Hood' Songs Make It Pleasant

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN I was a lad I thought Sherwood Forest the most romantic place in the world, and the Sheriff of Nottingham, with his massive eye, eagle brain and beer binge the funniest man. I longed to have a great big baritone voice so I could put forth the song of Brown October Ale.

Last night these and other splendors were revived at the Adelphi Theatre, where R. H. Burnside put on a production of "Robin Hood" that is billed as being in the original manner of the Bostonians. Never having seen the Bostonians, I'm no expert; but it looked to me just like a Burnside revival.

The chorus numbers are simple, the encores last as long as there's a handclap left in the house, and everybody sings nice and loud. Which, I guess, is the way things should be, for operettas were simple in the days before dream ballets and it took more than one song to carry a show.

The deKoven score remains as beguiling as ever, and "Nine Tailors," the "Tinker Song," "Brown October Ale" and "Oh Promise Me" are only a few of the numbers which made "Robin Hood" a hit for a generation. The book, by today's standards, is terrible—but at least they get it over with fast.

Hearty Singing

Mr. Burnside's costumes are fresh and green and his choristers are numerous. His principals—Barbara Scully as Maid Marian, Robert Field as Robin Hood, George Lipton as the Sheriff, Edith Herlick as Allan-a-Dale and Wilfred Glenn as Will Scarlet—sing with right good wil and most of the time you can understand them. And I thought Frank Farrell was pretty funny as Sir Guy of Gisborne.

Perhaps there is a new set of youngsters who will revel in the antics of the Sheriff—and there must be quite a few of us old folks who will find "Robin Hood" pleasant enough.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 8, 1944

Songs Mother Used to Sing

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BROADWAY celebrated Election Night, with its stake in the future, with a journey into the past. Reginald de Koven's light opera, *Robin Hood*, which I last saw 20-odd years ago, was first produced in the '90s. It is a period piece with all the faded trappings of period pieces; but the score is good period music—romantic and rollicking by turns, with operatic flourishes and big, swelling finales.

The present production has done very nicely by the music. Robert Field in the title role, Barbara Scully as Maid Marian, Edith Herlick (who draws down *Oh Promise Me*) as Alan-a-Dale, Wilfred Glenn as Will Scarlet, all have pleasing voices, and there is a lusty chorus to roll such old favorites as *Brown October Ale* up to the rafters. The music, which of course is the most important thing about *Robin Hood*, is also the best done.

• • •

Otherwise, the great age of the work is accentuated by the production. The libretto is about what you would expect and the comedy rather worse than you might imagine; and instead of being played down, it is played up. On a barnstorming tour, the comic Sheriff and the doltish Guy of Gisborne might have some luck with their horseplay, but on Broadway they should hurry through it as quietly as possible. The dancing, too, is not only full of old-fashioned capers, for which there is some excuse, but also sloppily executed, for which there is none. And the far too many encores both overwork the tunes and over-extend the performance.

An evening, in brief, of very tuneful music and very tiresome folderol, both out of the past.

"Sleep My Pretty One"

Play by Charlcie and Oliver Garrett; staged by Roy Hargrave; settings by Raymond Sovey. Presented by Richard W. Krakeur, in association with Roger Clark, at the Playhouse Theatre, November 2, 1944.

NEW YORK TIMES
November 3, 1944

The New 'Sleep My Pretty One' Gives a Bizarre Touch of Life on Gramercy Park

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IF THE Oliver H. P. Garretts—man and wife—are to be credited, Gramercy Park belies its stately reputation. Behind those Stanford White facades lurk the furies, cracking their fingers, pouring poison, pushing girls out of the high french windows. Beyond the tall doors are matriarch, fierce, a little insane, clutching to their bosoms middle-aged sons who wish to get married. Possibly, however, Mr. and Mrs. Garrett have been misinformed. The evidence is not all in, only that part of the evidence called "Sleep, My Pretty One," which opened last night at the Playhouse to stagger the imagination of old Park residents.

"Sleep, My Pretty One," has a matriarch, along with a butler, and she wishes her son to stay with her as a comfort to her crippled years. Like a good Gramercy Parish citizen, or a cat with mice, he keeps bringing girls home, and she is forced to get rid of them by slander, untruths or the window. The last one almost beats her, but not quite, before the Garretts are willing to call quits to the

THE CAST

Edward, the Butler.....J. Colville Dunn
Kathryn (Kitty) Sturdevant.....Norma Chambers
Emily Groat, a Nurse.....Teresa Dale
Eleanor Coates.....Audrey Ridgewell
Winifred Agate.....Julie Stevens
Donald Sturdevant.....Harry Ellerbe
Mrs. Alicia Sturdevant.....Pauline Lord
Lieut. (Hank) Williams.....Don Gibson
Dr. Ogden Pomfret.....Ivan Simpson

whole thing. Whatever may be the simple pleasure allowed by the Park's guardian rules, the theatre requires of melodrama more action, less words and fewer inanities than "Sleep, My Pretty One," has provided. Pauline Lord has the leading role, and seemed a bit baffled by it last night; there is a pretty good performance in a minor role by Don Gibson. Park privileged denied.

NEW YORK SUN
November 3, 1944

'Sleep, My Pretty One,' Done at Playhouse, Incredibly Dawdling Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

PAULINE LORD, who has given some of the finest performances of our town and time, now comes upon an incredibly dawdling and somber play, "Sleep, My Pretty One," exhibited last evening at the Playhouse. Both Miss Lord and the play are hard to take.

Here is a study of a malevolent and neurotic woman whose possessive love for her only son is such that she will try anything, including murder, to keep him out of marriage. When all else has failed she kills herself.

This new play is the work of Charicle and Oliver Garrett, the same Mr. Garrett who was a very good New York reporter in his days on the old morning World. The estimable Richard W. Krakeur, in association with Roger Clark, has produced it. Roy Hargrave has directed, and Raymond Sovey has contributed two fetching realistic interiors. But the combination of such talents has brought forth a melodrama that is talky and ambling, and lacking in credibility, excitement and suspense. The big scene at the finish is a long time coming.

The Garretts present the case of Mrs. Alicia Sturdevant, invalid and matriarch of a gloomy Gramercy Park mansion, and her son, Donald. He has been engaged twice previously, but one of the girls walked out on it after a session with the mother and the other was claimed by a strangely accidental death. When Donald becomes engaged for the third time and brings the attractive Winifred to Gramercy Park, Mrs. Sturdevant resorts to lies and cunning without avail. Finally she tries to push the girl out of the window. Unsuccessful in this attempt, she gets her way by swallowing poison.

Pauline Lord brings all her vibrations and her vibrancy to the character of the sick, relentless and self-tortured Mrs. Sturdevant, but it is one of the most unfortunate roles of her career. Harry Ellerbe, a fine young actor when you saw him in "Ghosts," seemed to think last night that he was still playing it. But certainly the part of the 40-year-old Donald, bound to his mother's will, is an impossible one.

There's one bright spot in the casting of the Garretts' play. Julie Stevens, as Donald's third fiancee, brings naturalness and vitality to a difficult role; she is completely charming all the way, and it's quite apparent from the very beginning that her Navy lieutenant would eventually get her and that the dreadful old Mrs. Sturdevant would never do her in.

"Sleep, My Pretty One" fails as a thriller—and as a play. Forty-eighth street's score for the week stands thus:

One hit, two errors.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 3, 1944

The Ogress of Gramercy Park

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

TIMES have changed; there's nothing in neighborhoods any more. Take 48th Street. Right next door to those delightful people in *Harvey* have moved the infernally dull and unpleasant ones in *Sleep, My Pretty One*. This latest treatment of the silver-cord theme, of a paralytic mother who has enslaved her son and holds on to him by hook or by crook, is about equally tedious and incredible. One reason for that is it's about equally stagy and upstagy, combining inside a Gramercy Park mansion a lot of utterly impossible melodrama with enough butlers and tony accents, mousses and souffles, for two or three drawing-room comedies.

Old Alicia Sturdevant's machinations are evil indeed. Winifred, her son's latest fiancee, is his third. Mama presumably pushed the first out of a fourth-story window, and sent the second scooting with lurid lies. To dispose of the third, she first tells Donald that Winnie has been promiscuous. When that fails, she advises Winnie that Donald has inherited insanity from his pa. When that has no effect, she drops poison into Winnie's demi-tasse; and that miscarrying, again essays the window trick. Finally she quaffs the poison herself.

• • •

Even granting Donald an outsize mother-fixation, it is impossible to believe that a two-days-old tomtit would fall for Mama's behavior and explanations. But even stranger is that so much evil-doing should provoke such overpowering ennui.

As Mama, Pauline Lord drew a very tough assignment; and though her breathless, tentative manner always has its points, she can't give the part any reality or real interest. Harry Ellerbe drew an even tougher assignment as the 40-year-old son; he does what he can with a very unsympathetic part. The evening's brightest note is struck by Julie Stevens who, as Vinnie, is fresh, natural and likeable. Raymond Sovey has upheld the traditions of Gramercy Park with his sets; not so the Garretts with their story.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 3, 1944

'Sleep, My Pretty One' a Gentle Little Thriller for Pauline Lord

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ALTHOUGH "Sleep, My Pretty One" is only midly suspenseful as a thriller, it has three or four advantages which one or another of the recent entries in the polite horror field have lacked.

It has Pauline Lord to improve a fairly obvious role just by being Pauline Lord; it has been nicely staged by Roy Hargrave; the authors, Charicle and Oliver Garrett, have made their characters quite human—and the heroine is a mighty attractive girl.

Often the heroine of a chill drama—meaning the girl who almost gets murdered—is just somebody to have around as a potential corpse; but as Julie Stevens portrays her in the new piece at the Playhouse she is alive and blooming and hearty, and I'd have been sorry if either of Miss Lord's attempts to rub her out had succeeded.

Miss Stevens becomes the fiancee of a 40-year-old mother's boy who lives, with Mama, in a house on Gramercy Park. Mama—Miss Lord—has been a chair-bound paralytic ever since her husband went down with the Titanic, so by now she's a little tired of sitting. She passes the time by keeping her son from marrying anybody, and Miss Stevens is the third of his fiancees.

You Know the Rest.

You can carry on from there. Up to now I haven't blabbed too much because you know darn well any time you see a sweet old lady in a wheel chair in a melodrama she'll turn out to be a heilion.

Miss Lord masks her malevolence with the reticence of a good actress, although I wish she wouldn't repeat half-sentences so much. Harry Ellerbe as the son, Norma Chambers as a sister, Teresa Dale as a nurse, Don Gibson as a young naval lieutenant and Ivan Simpson as a doctor are okay, and J. Colville Dunn is better than the usual run of butlers you get nowadays—on stages. The Garretts have outfitted them all with normal conversation, which isn't a bad trick for playwrights to learn. There are two good sets by Raymond Sovey.

I'm sorry that "Sleep, My Pretty One" failed to raise my hackles. Trouble was I didn't worry enough. I always knew the cute Miss Stevens would come out all right.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 3, 1944

The Alarm Doesn't Ring

By HOWARD BARNES

A SILVER-CORD theme has been wired for melodrama in "Sleep, My Pretty One." Unfortunately, the circuit is faulty in the new play at the Playhouse. There are some creepy interludes, as a doting and benighted mother tries to do away with her son's intended wife, but they are scant dramatic excuse for a generally lifeless and stuttering entertainment. Pauline Lord is ill at ease in the part of the maternal monster. All the fine acting of Julie Stevens, Norma Chambers and Harry Ellerbe, Roy Hargrave's expert staging and a meticulous production did not suffice to keep this spectator from being quite as ill at ease as the star.

• • •

Charicle and Oliver Garrett, who composed the piece, have packed considerable intensity into their psychological melodrama. The action flows easily and naturally from an engaging commentary on manners to overt violence. The relationship of mother and son is handled with remarkable delicacy, and the scenes between the possessive dowager and various members of her select group in an old mansion on Gramercy Park have a certain satirical bite. The fact remains that the play never comes to life enough to justify the essential premise or the murderous climax.

• • •

Miss Lord may not have been the actress for the all-important part in "Sleep, My Pretty One." She has a disarming gentility as old Mrs. Sturdevant, who has kept her son from marrying until he is forty and holds him to her even after her death. But she lacks the stern emphasis of tragic melodrama in the big scenes of the production. Miss Stevens is far better as the youngster from the Middle West, who walks unwittingly into a tangle of tradition and psycopathic impulses. When the work crackles out of a smoke smudge, it is generally her doing.

• • •

Ellerbe is fine as the weak son, who allows his mother to destroy his only true chance for happiness. Miss Chambers has one powerful scene with the sinister central figure of the piece, and Don Gibson contributes a brilliant bit as a naval lieutenant who has a nose for sick society. Hargrave has guided the players artfully through the menacing crescendo of the script. The crescendo is little more than a tiny tinkle at the Playhouse.

NEW YORK POST
November 3, 1944

Murder in Gramercy Park Is Deliberate and Well-Bred

By WILELLA WALDORF

OLD Mrs. Sturdevant of Gramercy Park is an admirer of the Edmund Pearson style of real-life murder stories, and so, we should imagine, are Charicle and Oliver Garrett, who have written a play about her entitled "Sleep, My Pretty One," produced last night at the Playhouse with Pauline Lord officiating from a wheel-chair.

Mystery addicts who can't keep awake without plenty of gun-play and a corpse at least every other chapter would probably find this latest arrival on the Broadway scene

an interminable bore. Those who fancy a well-rounded character study now and then, told in quieter, more deliberate fashion, should enjoy "Sleep, My Pretty One" in a well-bred, dignified way, without ever being in the slightest danger of betraying embarrassing evidences of undue excitement or hysteria.

"Sleep, My Pretty One" is not the sort of drama that depends upon clutching hands and eerie lighting effects on the stage and shrill little squeals in the audience to sustain suspense. Quiet, leisurely and a little musty, like Gramercy Park, it takes its time over the inevitable exposition in the first act, then proceeds calmly and unhurried to the business of showing the audience precisely how old Mrs. Sturdevant goes about getting rid of any young woman to whom her son Donald has the temerity to become engaged.

Miss Lord Returns

The old lady is not a particularly clever killer, but she is cunning, with the petulance of a spoiled child, embittered, warped and intensely attached to her only son, a man of forty who has never been able to make any lasting attachments of his own. Mother always saw to that.

Since her stroke shortly after her husband went down on the Titanic, it has been the custom in the household to pamper her in all things, even to keeping from her any news that the country happens to be at war. She knows all about Pearl Harbor, of course, but lets the family go on pretending everything's pretty much the same as it was in 1912.

This scheming old lady, outrageous but quite believable in her determination to get what she wants by any means she considers necessary, is played by Miss Lord a bit uncertainly at first, but the characterization grows more vivid as the play proceeds and the actress feels her way into the part. Miss Lord has peculiar ideas of phrasing and a vague, offhand style of delivery that goes well enough with this particular role, once you get used to it, and it is evident as the drama mounts that she is an actress of perception and skill, not merely a bundle of slightly bewildering mannerisms.

She is assisted by good solid direction from Roy Hargrave, at Gramercy Park tempo, and a competent company. Harry Ellerbe as the son, Julie Stevens as his fiancee, and Norma Chambers as his sister are all effective in important roles, and there is good work in lesser parts by Don Gibson, Ivan Simpson, Teresa Dale, J. Colville Dunn and Audrey Ridgewell. Raymond Sovey's two spacious sets fit well into the Gramercy Park picture.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 3, 1944

Pauline Lord Does Her Best with Trite Theme

By BURTON RASCOE

SOMEONE should have told the authors (Charlcie and Oliver Garrett) and the producer (Richard W. Krakeur) of the Pauline Lord vehicle, Sleep, My Pretty One, which opened at the Playhouse last night, that there were three variations on the Silver Cord theme on Broadway last year, two of them much better than this one, and that they were all prompt failures; that the theme has been overdone. They might have been saved some heartaches and expense.

In spite of Miss Lord, whose performances are always memorable in themselves, Sleep, My Pretty One is without merit except in two or three spots where Miss Lord manages to raise the lines of her role above the dramatic commonplaces of the situations. It drags heavily. The denouement is a surprise and rather thrilling, but it takes until 11:20 for the play to reach that point. It requires considerable fortitude on the part of the playgoer to stick it out that long.

Devoted to Son.

Shortly after the play begins, you know that Miss Lord is the widow of a man who went down on the Titanic; that she suffered a stroke on learning, after his death, that he had had a mistress; that she is pathologically devoted to her bachelor son, now 40; that she was the cause of the sudden unexplained decision of her son's first fiancee to flee their Gramercy Park home on the night before their wedding; and that she was the cause of her son's second fiancee's fall from Miss Lord's fourth floor bedroom to her gored death on the iron pickets below.

So, just as soon as Julie Stevens appears on the scene as the house guest and the fiancee of Harry Ellerbe (Miss Lord's son in the play) you know she is destined to be the next victim of the warped mind of the vicious old woman. Knowing also, the general pattern of all the Silver Cord variations, you know almost from the first five minutes just how the thing is going to develop—the Iago-like implanting of lies and suspicions; the cunning protestations which touch the victims' sentimentality the better to deceive them.

It's Routine.

What you are not prepared for is element of cheap theatrical trickery; the blatant stunts employed to deceive the audience. There is the poisoned wine which I was sure Miss Stevens would not drink because the authors so patiently wanted me to believe she would. It is early established, very elaborately, that Miss Steven has a lamentable nervous habit of accidentally knocking over cups and glasses the moment she gets near them, so I knew she was not only not going to drink the poison but also that she wasn't going to knock over the cup—you are supposed to be teased into thinking the latter.

I wasn' prepared for the disclosure of the means whereby Miss Lord effected the demise of her son's second fiancee (by her attempt to repeat her success) nor was I able to guess it. But by 11:15 I didn't much care.

Miss Stevens is sweet and pretty, and was engaging and natural as the forthright but naive fiancee; Mr. Ellerbee is attractive and assured but a trifle too likable and solid-looking in character for the weakling he was supposed to be. The others, aside from Teresa Dale, as a nurse, were rather badly directed.

This melodrama is too familiar in theme and too routine in contrivance for me to recommend it.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 3, 1944

'Sleep, My Pretty One' at Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

EVERY time I woke up last night at the Playhouse, Pauline Lord was either being pushed onto her own private elevator or being pushed off of it. Miss Lord does all her acting in a wheel chair, and, as heaven is my witness, her acting needs it.

Frankly and just between ourselves, I don't know when I've sat out as stupid a play as "Sleep, My Pretty One," written by Charlcie and Oliver Garrett and produced for no good reason by Richard Krakeur in association with Roger Clark.

Taking a hint from the piece's title, a goodly part of last night's congregation dozed blissfully through the first performance. Or went home! But we who stubbornly remained until the bitter end — and believe me, the end was bitter — found no reward, no reward whatever. Things up on the Playhouse stage got worse and worse as they went along. There were lines I'm sure I didn't hear with a wakeful ear. Just between ourselves, I must have dreamed them. Nightmare!

By nightmare I mean that not only the play was bad. I mean that Pauline Lord was also incredible. It's just as if "Anna Christie," "They Knew What They Wanted," "The Late Christopher Bean" and "Ethan Frome" had never happened.

Hollywoodian

Even if Charlcie and Oliver Garrett do mind me saying so, "Sleep, My Pretty One" is a bad Hollywoodian rewriting of "The Silver Cord." Mama loves Son so much that she'll kill any and every woman who comes between them. Believe it or not, Mama pushes Son's girl friends out of attic windows. And in Gramercy Park, of all places! Seated sedately in her wheel chair, she rolls revengefully up behind them. One shove, and out goes her would-be daughter-in-law onto the pavement. Mama, let me tell you, is a mean one.

Adding, as the saying is, incest to injury, Donald Sturdevant's Old Lady is a stinker. She's a stinker for three endless acts and four endless scenes. She rolls herself around her house in Gramercy Park, filling the air with venom. She wants what she wants when she wants it. And what she wants is her offspring Donald who, if you ask me, wouldn't make Winifred Agate very happy, anyway. In this respect, I agree with Mama. Donald Sturdevant, as played by Harry Ellerbe, is not the guy for so nice a girl as Winifred.

This sort of stuff goes on, act by act, scene by scene. It's sorry stuff, recited in language that is not believable. And, which is somewhat surprising, Miss Lord and her fellow-performers don't seem to believe it either.

Oh Lord, How Long?

Let's say it, and get it over with. Pauline Lord, as Mrs. Alicia Sturdevant in a wheel chair, goes through the evening as if it were a painful duty, which it is. I don't think I've ever seen an actor or actress of standing give so lackluster a performance. Why Miss Lord ever bothered about "Sleep, My Pretty One" I'll never know. No amateur down in Macdougal street, no young hopeful up at the Blackfrairs' Guild, ever gave so uninspired a performance. Now, away from the Playhouse, I can't believe it was Pauline Lord at all.

And her supporting—and supporting is used in an imaginary way—cast is nothing much to fill out a paragraph. As the son of the witch who is Mrs. Alicia Sturdevant, Harry Ellerbe is consistently out of key. He's trying to be an Oswald to a Hedda Gabler who doesn't exist. Julie Stevens, as the frustrated fiancee, is nice to look at. But the role, as written by playwrights Charlcie and Oliver Garrett, is much too much for her. It would be too much for Duse, Bernhardt and Sir Henry Irving combined.

Roy Hargrave, who directed "Pick Up Girl" and "Catherine Was Great," has done a messy job with "Sleep, My Pretty One."

"Harvey"

Comedy by Mary Chase; staged by Antoinette Perry; settings by John Root. Presented by Brock Pemberton at the Forty-Eighth Street Theatre, November 1, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 2, 1944

"Fay in Wonderland"

By HOWARD BARNES

FANTASY has enchantment and infinite delight in "Harvey." The new play at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre is as wise as it is witty; as occult as it is obvious. Perhaps you don't think you can make a six foot, one and a half inch white rabbit the central character of a show, even though he never appears on the stage. Brock Pemberton, who produced the comedy, and Frank Fay and Josephine Hull, who play the leading roles, are almost certain to change your mind. For "Harvey" is one of those blessed theatrical events which occur all too rarely on Broadway. It is full of laughter and delicate meaning. It is stage sorcery at its whimsical best.

* * *

The Mary Chase script is the basis for a minor flag raising this morning, but the author has been extremely fortunate in having had impeccable and inspired interpretation of her fanciful notions. I have seen "Alice in Wonderland" die on the stage and on the screen. "Harvey" drags a bit at times, for want of more judicious cutting, but it is a lively and utterly charming show. All the wonderful nonsense that starts when an engaging bum takes up with an oversized bunny he finds leaning against a lamppost, is realized with subtlety, satire and gorgeous humor in the production. Fay's performance of the bum is memorable; Miss Hull's daffy dowager is a character not to be missed and Antoinette Perry's direction rarely falters.

* * *

It is good to see an elusive theme handled with consummate skill on the stage. Miss Chase did not make it easy for her collaborators. Her idea of placing many of her scenes in a sanitarium for wacky alcoholics was not an obviously merry one, but it has resulted in tremendously funny passages. The writing is good and genuinely comic. The acting illuminates it at every turn. When Fay, as an aimable town drunk, is about to be committed to the asylum, but convinces his distraught sister and a psychiatrist that the big rabbit is really accompanying him around to the local bars, the show realizes a touching approximation of the half-truths which become the heart of true fantasy.

* * *

It is Fay, of course, who makes the offering so splendidly satisfying. His talks with Harvey (the big rabbit) are so circumspect and fascinating that I, for one, want to know Harvey better. His serene acceptance of the fact that some people may think he is nuts is superlative make-believe. Miss Hull, the memorable old maid of "Arsenic and Old Lace," makes every scene in which she appears instinct with humor and the others in the company tend to their knitting nicely. Miss Perry has staged the show for laughter, as she should have, but she has not failed to underline it with considerable profundity. Harvey is a Pooka, a large animal spirit, originating in Celtic folklore. "Harvey" is a full-bodied and irresistible comedy, which no theater-lover can afford to miss.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 2, 1944

A Fine Night With a Rabbit

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HARVEY, for all its shortcomings, gave me the pleasantest theatrical lift I have had in a long time. The play itself is often wonderfully funny, and occasionally touched with something that goes deeper than fun. Beyond that, it contains two performances that it is difficult—and, for that matter, not at all necessary—to speak temperately of. Josephine Hull is as delightful as only Josephine Hull can be. As for Frank Fay, playing his first straight part since he was a shaver, and playing as tricky and perilous a part as ony one could be assigned, he is superb. To say that nobody else could have done it better is to say nothing; so far as I can see, nobody else could have done it at all.

The kind of idea that *Harvey* rests on has led in the past to more harrowing evenings than any other kind known to the theater. For the play deals with nothing other than a man whose constant companion is an imaginary rabbit 6 ft., 1½ in. tall. By every rule of the game, this would seem to be whimsy with a vengeance. But Mary Chase has turned it, for the most part, into wackiness with a verve and flow and ability to fly up and kick the beam that makes me temporarily tolerant even of leprechauns. She has given something funny to the theater, and something fresh. On that score she can be forgiven some pretty serious sins—a first act that keeps going way too long, and a last act that, in a sense, can't keep going at all.

* * *

Elwood P. Dowd, an old bachelor given to sociable drinking, has traded the reality of the world, which irked him, for the reality of a rabbit; and he has no regrets. But for his widowed sister and her eligible if elongated daughter Myrtle Mae, Elwood's companion has its distinct social embarrassments; and driven once too often, Sister decides it is time to enroll Elwood in a sanatorium. Sister, who isn't so unlike Elwood that she hasn't had glimpses of Harvey the Hare herself, winds up being confined in place of her brother. From then on, madness really takes over, reaching its height during an excellent second act.

What is specially good about so frequently funny a yarn is that it carries out the classic theme of humorists that in wackiness lies the greatest wisdom and the truest happiness. En route, also, Miss Chase finds time to spoof the psychiatrists. But her best job is her creation of Elwood himself.

Elwood, as Frank Fay plays him—timing everything faultlessly, and giving his screwiness the effect of drollery—is immense. Mr. Fay's job is a tightrope walk over Niagara, in which one false move could easily be fatal. But every move is right, and a few seem magical. There is a long scene at the end of the second act where Elwood, questioned by the psychiatrist, talks about himself and Harvey, and sometimes only sits and looks. It introduces a new and dangerous mood, and it could be awful. Somehow Fay manages to transfix the audience and touch them.

All this is not to slight Miss Hull. Her performance is delightful, but it is easier. And as the gangling, beau-barren Myrtle Mae, Jane Van Duser goes a good job too. In view of all this, Antoinette Perry obviously deserves credit for her direction.

Harvey, as aforesaid, has its decided weaknesses, and it's not for the literal-minded. But on a Broadway so given to staleness, it is so refreshing as to make one hope one really did see *Harvey* Wednesday night—and not just Harvey.

THE CAST

Myrtle Mae Simmons	Jane Van Duser
Veta Louise Simmons	Josephine Hull
Elwood P. Dowd	Frank Fay
Miss Johnson	Eloise Sheldon
Mrs. Ethel Chauvenet	Frederica Going
Ruth Kelly, R.N.	Janet Tyler
Marvin Wilson	Jesse White
Lyman Sanderson, M.D.	Tom Seidel
William R. Chumley, M.D.	Fred Irving Lewis
Betty Chumley	Dora Clement
Judge Omar Gaffney	John Kirk
E. J. Lofgren	Robert Gist

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 2, 1944

'Harvey' Is Just Wonderful and His Friend Frank Fay Is Superb

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"HARVEY" is the most delightful, droll, endearing, funny and touching piece of stage whimsey I ever saw, and in it Frank Fay, making his first appearance in a legitimate play, in modern playgoing times, gives a performance so perfect that forever hence he will be identified with the characters he plays, as was Joseph Jefferson with Rip van Winkle or Frank Bacon with Lightnin' Bill Jones. Not since "On Borrowed Time" has fantasy so comforted me and made me happy.

Mr. Fay's character is not Harvey. Harvey is a white rabbit six feet one and one-half inches tall whom nobody—well, hardly anybody—sees. Mr. Fay is Harvey's worshipful companion, Elwood P. Dowd. For the moment Harvey has ducked out on Mr. Fay, who is busy taking bows at the 48th St. Theatre, and is sitting here at the office with me while I write this, looking friendly. Pretty soon we are going out and have a drink. On me, I insist.

The play is by Mary Chase, about whom I wish I knew more. The production is by Brock Pemberton, Broadway's most patient producer, who will wait for years for something he likes. The direction is by Antoinette Perry. Together, Chase, Pemberton and Perry have fashioned a piece of theatre way off the beaten track, have cast it well, and have had the double inspiration of hiring not only Mr. Fay but also the equally lovable, equally funny Josephine Hull.

The Rabbit 'll Get You

"Harvey" is not for the completely literal-minded, who may think it's plain silly to make all this fuss about a big white rabbit nobody ever sees — well, hardly anybody; but I suspect that the rabbit will get all but the solidest brains sooner or later.

This Elwood P. Dowd is as nice a fellow as you'd ever want to meet—gentle, sunny, courteous, friendly and generous. He drinks quite a bit but is never out of line — as remote from being a drunk as the late Carrie Nation, but more fun. He likes to talk with anybody, which is how he met Harvey. He was coming out of a place one night and Harvey was leaning against a lamp-post and Harvey said hello.

Since then they have been inseparable. This is some trouble to Elwood P. Dowd's sister, Veta Louise Simmons, and her daughter, Myrtle Mae, because the two are living in Elwood's house out in Los Angeles and they can't have any social life. Every time they have a party Elwood comes in and introduces Harvey to everybody and everybody goes home.

Mixup at Chumley's

So Veta Louise thinks it would be best if Brother Elwood were put away in Dr. Chumley's place, Chumley's Rest. She goes there and starts telling them about Harvey, and before she knows it she's the one sitting in a warm tub in a guest chamber upstairs, while Elwood wanders blissfully around making friends with all and sundry.

There is much more that happens—some of it funny, some of it giving you the oddest lump in the throat—but I shan't spoil it by telling. Except, perhaps, to hint that Dr. Chumley and Harvey become acquainted, too. Harvey can stop clocks—stop a clock so you can go wherever you want for as long as you want and do whatever you want, and when you come back not one little minute has passed. Dr. Chumley rather fancies this, for he'd like to go to a camp in a maple grove outside Akron with a young woman

who never talks and drink beer for two weeks.

As Elwood P. Dowd puts it, Einstein conquered time and space, but Harvey has conquered time, space and objections.

There is a cure for Elwood, and he almost gets it—but in the end he is allowed to stay as he is. Any other solution would have been a dramatic crime.

Fay and Miss Hull make a perfect team—he starry-eyed, smooth and wonderful at overplaying, and she fluttery, mussed and bewildered. The others are excellent—Jesse White as a husky sanitarium attendant, Fred Irving Lewis as Dr. Chumley, Janet Tyler as a nurse and Tom Seidel as a young doctor, in particular. John Root did the sets of house and private asylum.

Come on, now, Harvey. There's a place across the street.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
November 2, 1944

"Harvey"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IF a rabbit, six feet one and one-half inches tall, sits down beside you at Charlie's, that will be Harvey, and you may count yourself fortunate. Harvey appears to those who are happy, and to those who have taken a drink now and then through the years and are the better for it. If Harvey does not visit Charlie's he can be found at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, where Mary Chase's new play opened last evening with "Harvey" in quotation marks and giving a very delightful evening to the theatre. Brock Pemberton, who hitherto has held sternly apart from plays about rabbits, is the producer and Frank Fay and Josephine Hull are providing the last word in acting. Harvey, in or out of quotation, is one of the treats of the fall theatre.

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The story of "Harvey" is a little hard to explain, six-foot rabbits being unusual along Broadway by night. Elwood P. Dowd, an amiable man with a thirst for bar-rooms and people, met Harvey one day leaning against a wall, and they became friends. When Elwood began bringing Harvey home, Elwood's sister, who had respectable friends, decided it was time he had a rest. The difficulty was she had seen Harvey, too, and ultimately the psychiatrist meets up with him also—in Charlie's, of course. At the end of the play in which the title-player never appears, the sister decides that Elwood had better keep Harvey around.

A fantasy such as "Harvey" can run into fearful trouble if it is badly done, but the only objection that can be raised against Mrs. Chase's play is that some scenes are a bit slow. The first act, in particular, is far too long. But when Mr Fay is on the stage, quietly explaining his relationship with Harvey, the theatre could ask for little more. Mr. Fay does not act. He wanders amiably about the stage, never raises his voice, and when he wants to make a full gesture he lazily lifts a finger or two. Harvey obviously is behind him all the time—and perhaps all those years of the Palace and the night clubs, where actors grow accustomed to dealing with rabbits and legitimate parts.

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Josephine Hull also is no beginner on the stage, and her portrait of the woman who is trying to bring up her daughter in such a bizarre household is a masterpiece. She always is in trouble, always is misunderstood; when she takes her brother to the rest home, she herself is locked up there. Flighty and wide-eyed, Miss Hull is a perfect foil for Mr. Fay's casual ease. The rest of the cast back up the two principals, although the play is far from theirs. Janet Tyler is an attractive nurse in the rest home, Fred Irving Lewis a properly stocky psychiatrist, John Kirk the family attorney. Antoinette Perry has directed the play so that it runs easily, and John Root has designed the setting suitable for a home or rabbit hutch—whichever.

Harvey is worth knowing, either at Charlie's or on Forty-eighth Street.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 2, 1944

Harvey, by Mary Chase, Hilarious, Paradoxical

By BURTON RASCOE

MY ribs are still aching. I can't recall that I ever laughed so hard and so continuously at any show as I did last night at the opening of Harvey, by Mary Chase, at the 48th Street Theater. And I was in good company; the audience was in hysterics a large part of the time almost from the moment the curtain went up until it went down for the evening. This play will be here for a very long spell.

I foresee that Harvey is going to have an immediate effect upon our general speech and conduct. If, for instance, you are idling along the counters of a department store, waiting for your wife to complete her purchases, and a clerk asks, "Can I do anything for you?" before you think, you may find yourself smiling begullingly and asking, in turn, "What have you in mind?"

That sort of thing can be upsetting. If too many people are affected by Harvey, however unconsciously, the thing can be very insidious, and our whole scheme of civilization may be imperiled. Voters may even become skeptical of campaign promises, and when someone begins to take the biggest promises seriously they are liable to say to him, "Now let's all go down to Jim's bar and play the juke box and have a nice evening together and stop thinking about Santa Claus."

Paradoxical

Harvey is hilarious, cockeyed common sense. It is an amiable lush's dream of a perfect world. It is a boozy acceptance of reality, without bitterness, without envy, hatred or ill-will. It is an acute and penetrating criticism of all too proper and responsible conduct; and the author should probably be pinched for contributing to the delinquency of adults, for I'll bet several persons, after seeing the play last night, partook of nips of alcohol in aqueous solution before going to bed, without a shred of conscience about the matter. Some may even have seen Harvey and spoken to him.

Harvey, said Frank Fay last night, (in the role of Elwood P. Dowd) is better than Einstein: Einstein did away with time and space; but Harvey does away with time and space—and objections.

It is hard for me to explain what Harvey is about without running the risk of alienating your interest—if you a teetotaler or an abstemious and responsible citizen; and that would be a shame, for I'd guarantee that Bernard Shaw, a teetotaler and a vegetarian, would laugh his pink cheeks blue at Harvey, for it is, essentially, a very Shavian comedy, paradoxical and full of penetrating social criticism.

Harvey, in the play, is a blue rabbit, 6 feet and 2 inches tall, who became Elwood P. Dowd's friend, companion, adviser and foreteller of events, one night when Elwood had decided that a drinking companion had had too much and had put the chap in a cab and sent him home, while Elwood took a stroll for some fresh air. Elwood lives with his widowed sister (Josephine Hull), a woman devoted to civic and cultural affairs, and her daughter (Jane Van Duser). They doubt the existence of Harvey, because they can't see him; and, as is the way with sensible women, when they discover a male loved one is obviously an alcoholic with apparent hallucinations, they seek to have him committed to an asylum for psychopaths, in this case one euphemistically called Chumley's Rest.

Upside Down.

Harvey then attaches himself to Dr. Chumley (Fred Irving Lewis), head of the institution, when Elwood beguiles Dr. Chumley into taking an evening off and relaxing in good company at Joe's. You know what can happen to you. Your sense of values becomes distorted for several hours and you may be pursued by a very tall blue rabbit.

In all this, Elwood remains serene, in a clear-thinking way of perceiving and appraising things, in a warm alcoholic glow; and his counsel to us is not to take ourselves too seriously and to be generous, gentle, gallant and courteous if we wish to be liked and loved.

The whole fantasy is delicious, subtle, clever and very funny. Mr. Fay has here a role which should make him the Frank Bacon of his day. Miss Hull is a scream. All the rest of them are good, too, particularly the angular Miss Van Duser. . . Three cheers for Mary Chase, the author, and a razzle-dazzle for Bock Pemberton, the producer!

THE NEW YORK SUN
November 2, 1944

Mr. Fay's Friend Is a Big White Rabbit in 'Harvey,' Enormously Funny Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THAT deft, droll and quiet-spoken comedian known as Frank Fay, of the expressive face and the repressive style of acting, turned to a straight play last night for the first time in many years and he was triumphant. He fascinated and charmed the audience that gathered at the 48th Street theater for the first performance of "Harvey."

You'll be hearing a lot about "Harvey." Mary Chase of Denver wrote it and Brock Pemberton of Emporia and points East has produced it. It's a quaint, capricious and enormously amusing comedy, with a touch of fantasy. It sags in spots, the first act is over-long and the third is not up to the pace of the second. But there's enough comedy in the whole of it for it to be enthusiastically commended to your attention.

Brock Pemberton, in the casting of Miss Chase's odd and daffy script, found the one actor in the business for the role of Elwood P. Dowd and his name is Fay. Bring along the ebullient Josephine Hull and then add Harvey, otherwise known as the Pooka, and you have an entertainment that is frequently hilarious.

I must tell you about Elwood P. Dowd and his friend Harvey. Elwood P. is a drinking man and Harvey is a big white rabbit. They are inseparable. Elwood takes Harvey into his home, makes the rounds of the bars with him, buys him tickets on trains. The ever-present Harvey becomes such a problem that Elwood's agitated sister decides to have him committed and hustles him off to Chumley's Rest, a mental hospital, but when she confesses to having been seeing Harvey herself she is seized and they begin putting her in cold tubs. Pretty soon it's Dr. Chumley who is seeing Harvey and is being followed around by him. It's eventually the decision of all concerned that the world will be a better pace for having the gentle Elwood remain as he is, with Harvey joining him at the Fourth Street Firehouse and going with him to the bars.

Frank Fay, quiet, wistful and detached, a master of timing and the sidewise glance, has some wonderful moments, particularly in a second-act scene when he describes his meeting with the six-foot white rabbit, leaning against a lamp-post, and who said his name was Harvey. They became attached to each other at that very moment.

Miss Chase's dialogue is generally excellent. Antoinette Perry's staging is in the right mood. Josephine Hull, an actress at her best when facing a dilemma, or even a Pooka, gives a grand performance and is well teamed with Mr. Fay. Miss Hull remains a delight to this department whether she is playing the pleasantly homicidal Abby Brewster, the absent-minded but undaunted Mrs. Sycamore, or the distracted sister of Elwood P. Dowd, who generally has Harvey at his side.

There's good casting, too, in the other roles. Jane Van Duser, Janet Tyler, Fred Irving Lewis, Tom Seidel and certainly Jesse White contribute to the fun. But it's Mr.

Fay's evening, and his play. I must look up his notices in his early Shakespearean roles.

Is Harvey real or a hallucination? The question is debatable. But Mr. Pemberton, with this new piece by Mary Chase, surely has a hit. They should be seeing big white rabbits in 48th Street for many months to come.

NEW YORK POST
November 2, 1944

'Harvey' a Good Idea Gone Wrong at the 48th Street

By WILELLA WALDORF

A PLAYWRIGHT named Mary Chase has created one of the most delightful characters Broadway has experienced in years, and Frank Fay is playing him entrancingly at the 48th St. Theatre.

Miss Chase, unfortunately, has also written a play and it's the wrong play to go with her character. Under the title "Harvey" it scurries around clumsily and noisily most of the evening, except for a few blessed moments in the second and third acts when Mr. Fay is permitted to sit down quietly in a psychiatrist's office and talk about himself and his most intimate friend, Harvey, a white rabbit six feet one and a half inches in height.

How any playwright could have invented Elwood P. Dowd and made the fatal error of involving him in a farce so lacking in subtlety and taste, we cannot imagine. It is our considered opinion that Miss Chase must actually be two people operating under one name. One of the collaborators must be a person of keen perception, with an elfin sense of fantasy and a warm sympathy for those members of the human race who are just a bit different from the majority. The other is a routine gag artist with all of the usual laugh provokers at his fingertips and no scruples about using them anywhere, anytime.

Wonderful Frank Fay

A charming fantasy might have been written about Elwood P. Dowd, and Mr. Fay is so remarkable in the role that one should be, without further delay. Instead, we are served at the 48th St. with a crude farce in which Dowd is rushed off to a sanitarium for mental cases.

Laugh shows have often been laid in such places in the past, but it so happens that Dowd is not a character for farce. He is sweet, gentle, harmless, touching, even a bit pathetic. "Harvey," especially in its long and cluttered first act, asks its audience to laugh at mental derangement. There are laughs to be had because Josephine Hull, who plays Elwood's sister, is an extremely comic actress who can roll people in the aisles merely by waddling fussily across the stage to answer the telephone. But this reviewer, for one, simply cannot snicker comfortably at mental derangement.

That first act embarrassed and disturbed us last night, and while the author—or authors—gave us two uncommonly rewarding scenes with Mr. Fay later on, the old trouble kept starting up again at odd moments to plague us all over again. Even while we were laughing helplessly at Miss Hull's hilarious postures and indignant protestations that she had been seized by White Slavers, and smiling tenderly at Elwood's droll and refreshing attitude toward life as elucidated by Mr. Fay, there was an undercurrent of nausea tugging away at our vitals.

Bicarbonate, Please

We quite realize that a number of irate theatregoers will soon be writing in to say that critics should not review plays while suffering from indigestion. It is probable that Brock Pemberton, the producer of "Harvey," and Antoinette Perry, its director, will be among their number.

All we can say is that it was something more profoundly disturbing than a rotten dinner that gave us a mild feeling of dyspepsia at the 48th St. last night. It was watching a good idea lamentably butchered.

Mr Fay's several sessions with the psychiatrists in Acts 2 and 3 are so rewarding that we can't help recommending them to any playgoer who enjoys the more charming things of the theatre. Maybe you can overlook the play that surrounds them. We couldn't.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 2, 1944

'Harvey' Presented at 48th St. Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

TO tell you the truth, I can imagine Frank Fay getting along without "Harvey," but, for the life of me, I can't imagine "Harvey" getting along without Frank Fay. Last night, at the 48th Street Theatre, the gentle vaudevillian whose cradle was a wardrobe trunk in his mother's dressing room, who made his on-stage debut at the age of four, who has acted Shakespeare with E. H. Sothern and Sir Henry Irving, who . . .

But you know Frank Fay. Everybody knows him. They most certainly like him in the leading role of the new arrival in 48th Street. Not as Harvey, mind you, for Harvey is a great big rabbit that isn't there. But as Elwood P. Dowd, the fabulous fellow who is Harvey's discoverer and friend. Apart from the Roland Young that used to be, I know of no one but Frank who could handle Elwood.

Who could handle Elwood and get away with Harvey. This Frank Fay does, and — seemingly, of course — without half trying. Broadway can claim no more expert, sensitive and dexterous impersonation. Comedy impersonation, I mean to say. Underplayed and eerie!

• • •

Rabbit Pie-Eyed

Up Boston way, where "Harvey" has been going through its pre-Manhattan paces, they wrote of the story as being whimsical. Well, say I, whimsical my foot. What's whimsical about an extremely pleasant fellow, Elwood P. Dowd by name, taking up with a persistently invisible rabbit which, if not seeing is believing, is more than a little fond of his visible potently attractive friend? Fantastic, yes. Whimsical, no.

Be this as it may, Elwood does take up with Harvey, which is the rabbit's name. And, in one way or two others, they have a joyous time together. But Veta, Elwood's devoted sister, is worried. She doesn't really object to Harvey hanging around the house, especially as she doesn't always see him. But she does object to Elwood's daylight hallucination. Maybe, she tells herself, Elwood might do well to see a psychiatrist.

He does! And, having done so, it is Veta, not Elwood, who is put away. Because of her putting away, Elwood and Harvey are worried. So is the psychiatrist who, one afternoon in Charley's Bar and Grill, sat with Harvey right there beside him. Harvey took a fancy to the doctor.

Gayety, Gusto, Guts

If this sounds silly, it's hilarious as acted out up on the stage of the 48th Street Theatre. I've already told you that the Elwood P. Dowd of Frank Fay is the answer to a playwright's, a producer's and a drama critic's prayer. Thanks to Mr. Fay, I, myself, would have been chumming up with Harvey if another act had come along. As it was, Harvey, or something invisible like him, walked away with Mike Todd's hat during an intermission.

Josephine Hull as Veta, Elwood's beautifully bepuzzled sister, is in finest fettle. My only complaint in Miss Hull's direction is that Playwright Mary Chase hasn't given her enough to do. But what she has to do she does to perfection. As well as anyone I know, the not-so-little lady knows her way around even the most cockeyed comedy. The others, all 10 of them, leave me where they found me—except, perhaps, Jesse White as Wilson . . .

Don't, I beg you, let them tell you that the tenant of the 48th Street Theatre is a whimsy, bringing to mind J. M. Barrie, A. A. Milne and he whom Dorothy Parker once referred to as Louisa May Woollcott. "Harvey" has gayety, gusto and guts.

"Embezzled Heaven"

Play by L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay, based on a novel by Franz Werfel; staged by B. Iden Payne; settings by Stewart Chaney. Presented by the Theatre Guild at the National Theatre, October 31, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
November 1, 1944

Ethel Barrymore Stars in A Theatre Guild Pageant

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE Theatre Guild, which owns a private mint in "Oklahoma," cannot be accused of being parsimonious. It is sharing what must be a sizable slice of the profits with its loyal subscribers in the form of an elaborate new production called "Embezzled Heaven," presented last night at the National Theatre with Ethel Barrymore as the star.

Franz Werfel's novel upon which the play is based tells the story of Teta, the cook at Argan Castle near Prague, who is paving her way to Heaven by educating her nephew, Mojmir, to be a priest. A pious peasant somewhat excessively preoccupied with the hereafter, she wants to be quite certain that her immortal soul is bound for the right place when she dies.

It is not a readily believable story unless one accepts it as an unpretentious spiritual legend of the Moravian peasantry, full of simple faith and innocent sentiment.

There is nothing unpretentious about the Guild's version of "Embezzled Heaven." Produced in a prologue and three acts, the play

THE CAST

Teta	Ethel Barrymore
Bichler	Sanford Meisner
Countess Argan	Bettina Cerf
Mojmir (The Child)	Edward Fernandez
Mila	Wauna Paul
Zdenka	Madeline Lee
George	Val Witherill
Jarmila	Peggy Meredith
Franziska	Augusta Roeland
Mail Carrier	Don Valentine
Mrs. Schultz	Else Basserman
Pastor	Martin Blaine
Kovalsky	Frank Richards
Prossnitzer	Wolfe Barzell
Mojmir	Eduard Franz
Masha	Sheila Trent
Sottomaestro	Marcel Dill
Kompert	Harry Neville
Monsignore	John McKee
Maestro di Camera	Edward Kilcullen
The Pope	Albert Basserman
Papal Valet	Julian Benjamin
Physician	Graham Velsey
Swiss Guards	Paige Edwards and Robert Fletcher
Sedlaris	David Barnaby and Robert O'Brien

L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay have made from the Werfel book gives more opportunity for elaborate stage effects and theatrical pageantry than we are used to seeing in the dramatic line these evenings — always, of course, excepting Miss West's opulant bore, "Catherine Was Great."

The Cook Leaves

Teta's kitchen at Argan Castle, where the aged cook reigns over a retinue of minor servants and even the Countess is none too sure of her rights, is re-created in realistic detail by Stewart Chaney, and a whole dinner is hustled upstairs by the maids and footman until it's time for dessert. Teta doesn't wait for that. Leaving the post she's held for thirty years, she's off to her native village to live out a happy old age with her nephew, who writes that he has at last become the parish priest.

But Teta's dream of happiness is shattered, for the nephew turns out to be a scoundrel with considerable talent for extracting money on false pretenses. The play ends with a pilgrimage to the Vatican where the shattered old lady pours out her story to the Pope himself in a scene that omits none of the spectacle surrounding an audience with His Holiness.

Miss Barrymore moves through the play with a quiet dignity that always commands attention, her fine eyes often flashing in true Barrymore fashion. We should like to be able to say that her Teta moved us profoundly and that the play upon which so much care and attention have been lavished proved a gripping drama of spiritual faith and enobling sentiment, but we were never moved nor deeply stirred.

A Good Cast

Teta's final realization that she had been thinking only of her own passport to Heaven and little of anybody else all these years is accomplished amid so much Papal pageantry that the poignant situation of the woman who has lost one nephew but found another that she can love, seemed to matter less than the elaborate show that was going on around her.

Albert Basserman, making his debut on the English-speaking stage, gives an effectively conceived portrayal of the ill and aging Pontiff, and there are many good performances in the large and generally competent company, including Eduard Franz as the rascally nephew, Martin Blaine as the young priest who befriends Aunt Teta, and Sanford Meisner as a class-conscious gardener who meant to become a doctor but winds up as a footman after twenty-five years at Argan Castle. Wolfe Barzell did a good deal with one short comedy scene.

We were never bored by "Embezzled Heaven." As a show, it has its points and Miss Barrymore is always worth watching and listening to whether she happens to move you or not. As a play, it never succeeded in seeming quite real, and neither did Teta.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 1, 1944

'Embezzled Heaven' At National Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

THE glory that is Ethel Barrymore's and the grandeur that can be The Theatre Guild's are jointly responsible for as heartwarming a play going evening as I have spent in a couple of months of Sundays. Which is to report that the L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay on-stage translation of Franz Werfel's "Embezzled Heaven," directed by B. Iden Payne, designed by Stewart Chaney, produced by Teresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner, is a top-most item on anybody's list.

There's something simple and disarming about this new arrival in Forty-first Street, something sweetly simple, delightfully disarming. And most of the simplicity and all of the disarmament stem directly from the performance of Ethel Barrymore. As the humble Teta, who tries mistakenly to buy her way into heaven, she plays with all the vast, yet hidden, skill that is so rightfully her own. So undoubtedly, so glowingly, so effectively her own! Nowadays, Miss Barrymore is at the peak of her illustrious career.

If this sounds like a rave review, a rave review is precisely what this is. At the National Theatre, in "Embezzled Heaven," you are privileged to sit in the presence of the one and only First Lady of the American Theatre. Let the others stand in line.

Tragedy for Teta

The book I have not read. Nor have I ever wanted to. But, as a play—a vehicle, rather, for Ethel Barrymore—it is neither more nor less than a biography in dialogue, the one-track story of the one-track-minded Teta, who wants so awfully to go to heaven. A good cook but a better Catholic, she decides to make of her nephew a priest. Then, having frocked him with her savings, he will pray for her both before and after she is dead. It all seems so very simple!

But it isn't. The nephew, Mojmir, is a villain. Pretending to study for the priesthood, he lures her money away from her. Pretending to have moved into the priesthood, he continues to defraud her. But not for long. Teta, reading in his letters that Mojmir is on the verge of saying his first Mass, feels she must be among his congregation. So, leaving the Countess Argan's dinner for the Cardinal in the middle of its serving, she is off to Detva, Moravia.

The heartbreak that comes upon her there is overwhelming. Her awakening is tragic. Mojmir is not the village padre. Mojmir is no padre at all. Instead, he's a phoney fortune-teller in the local fair, a liar, a thief and the deceiver of his believing old aunt Teta.

Praise, Indeed

In the hands of Ethel Barrymore and a group of gifted actors—including Albert Basserman, who pretends to be Pope Pius XI with a German accent—Teta's story comes to an end in a reception hall of The Vatican, although it is not in me to know why she can't have a little happiness before she dies. Maybe she does, at that! Physicians, even Vatican physicians, have been known to be mistaken. Maybe Teta does go home to take care of her now-found padre.

As I have more than said, Ethel Barrymore is superb as the misguided and mistreated Teta. Her every speech, her every gesture, her every stretch of over or under accentuation is replete with the most human, the most radiant understanding. Other heartfelt on-stage portraits are supplied by Martin Blaine as the padre Mojmir should have been; Eduard Franz as the Mojmir who should have been a padre, and by Sanford Meisner as the downstairs Bichler.

The settings supplied by Steward Chaney—Teta's room in the Argan Castle, near Prague; the Kitchen of the Argan Castle; the Church Garden in Detva, Moravia, and a reception room in the Vatican—are massive, colorful, right as right can be be. From every point of view, Ethel Barrymore and "Embezzled Heaven" bring lustre, dignity and the warmth that is humanity to the current American theatre.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 1, 1944

Miss Barrymore

By HOWARD BARNES

A GREAT lady of the theater brings passion, eloquence and beauty to a ponderous play in "Embezzled Heaven." Ethel Barrymore has never been more magnificent than she is in this dramatization of the Franz Werfel novel at the National. For scene after scene she brings a laggard show to life and makes it glow with emotional and dramatic excitement. Whether she is down stage center, or sitting quietly in the shadows, her portrait of a cook intent on spiritual salvation amply justifies the Theater Guild's production of a somewhat muddled show. It is a privilege to see such acting in our time.

* * *

Miss Barrymore might have had more assistance from her script. L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay have picked out salient passages from the original in their adaptation, but they have scarcely succeeded in welding them into a powerful or sensible unity. Werfel, who explored Catholicism so splendid in "The Song of Bernadette," has offered the theater far less substance in "Embezzled Heaven." There are moments of soaring spiritual beauty in the work. There are astringent jabs at lip-service religion. But the play has gaping lines of cleavage, as the action follows a Czech pilgrim from 1913 to 1938, turbidly trying to establish a fresh and honest morality.

* * *

At least there is enough honesty in the exposition to permit a radiantly sincere performance by the star. From the moment that you discover Teta playing a zither in the cook's room of a Prague castle and trying to insure her place in the hereafter by contracting to make her nephew a priest, Teta is real and wonderful in Miss Barrymore's hands. Her desperate disappointment, years later at finding that the boy became a cheat and her journey to Rome to determine her chances of entering heaven constitute a tour-de-force of writing but not of acting. An electric theatrical impulse runs hrough "Embezzled Heaven" in its central characterizatinon.

* * *

As a friend said last evening, Miss Barrymore would be worth watching, reciting the alphabet. Her voice is spell-binding at the National and she does more than an A-B-C recitation. The scene in which a village priest uncovers the shame of her nephew's treachery is superb, and so is that in which she kneels in the Vatican and receives wise, if improbable advice from the Pontiff. Martin Blaine is excellent as the pastor who becomes her spiritual nephew. Albert Basserman, well known to screen fans, is beautifully restrained in the difficult role of Pope Pius. There are other fine portrayals in "Embezzled Heaven," notably that of Eduard Franz, as the charlatan. Stewart Chaney has designed the production sumptuously and B. Iden Payne has given it whatever dramatic contours the script has allowed. There is one real reason to go to the National. Ethel Barrymore is there, playing a good role in a rather bad play with eloquent and abiding artistry.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 1, 1944

Ethel Barrymore Almost Makes 'Embezzled Heaven' a Fine Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

BY lending to it her great resources as an actress and the silent but powerful impact of her personality, Ethel Barrymore has made "Embezzled Heaven" a better play than it has a right to be.

I wish I could say that, thanks to her, it is profoundly moving and spiritually exalting, but I can't. It is exalting and moving when Miss Barrymore gives it her strength, but without her it is contrived and studied. It has all of the surface but not enough of the depth of a religious drama, and many of its subsidiary characters have in them an almost old-fashioned theatricality which does not fit with the professed simplicity of the play itself.

From a novel by Franz Werfel, Ladislas Bush-Fekete and his wife, Mary Helen Fay, have made a stage piece about a simple Czechoslovak cook who dreams more of heaven than of earth. The Theatre Guild has mounted it with quiet splendor and presented it with dignity at the National Theatre.

Difference Is Simplicity

But I think the Werfel-Fekete combination has confused deliberate simplicity with true simplicity — of the kind one finds, for instance, in "I Remember Mama." It is not what has been written that makes the character so much as what Miss Barrymore herself has added to it; and many of the other parts in the play suffer by comparison because they are mere contrivances instead of being people.

Not quite all of them suffer by comparison, however. In his New York stage debut Albert Basserman, one-time dean of the German theatre and well established as a character player in the films — Basserman gives the role of Pope Pius XI a true sense of holiness and compassion.

This cook who dreams of heaven believes that the way there is only begun when one dies, and that the prayers of someone living must help the departed soul toward its goal. From her wages as kitchen mistress in the chateau of a countes she pays for the education of a nephew for the priesthood, so that she may have her own priest who will pray for her.

For twenty-five years she pays, and pays much, to a nephew she has not seen since he was a little boy. At last, he writes, he has become pastor of the church in the little home town; so the cook drops her pots and pans in the chateau near Prague and goes to him.

A Happy Death

Here is disillusion—for the nephew is not the pastor of the church, but a fortune-telling carnival mountebank. On a pilgrimage to Rome, the old cook begs comfort of the Pope —some assurance that heaven will be hers. No, she confesses, she really did not love her nephew; she made these sacrifices for herself. And now, too late, she has found a real love —for the friendly priest whose pastorate the phony nephew had claimed. His Holiness reassures her, and she dies there, happily, in the Vatican.

One can't quarrel with such a story, or want to disbelieve it. But, if it is to be moving and true, the wish for belief must be strong in the authors, too—and I don't think it has been strong enough. Such characters as a supercillous gardener and a conductor of religious pilgrimages are stock—carelessly and crudely written. The mountebank nephew, in his one short scene, is overdone.

Martin Blaine is quietly helpful as the young priest who leads Miss Barrymore to Rome. Sanford Meisner overplays the overwritten gardener part, and Eduard Franz, as the nephew, finds it difficult to make so much small villainy believable in so short a time. Wolfe Barzell has a comedy character scene as a 99-year-old Jewish gossip and plays it to the limit—but it is out of key with what should be the general feeling of the drama.

Stewart Chaney's settings—particularly the castle kitchen, are very good. B. Iden Payne directed. But the evening is mostly Miss Barrymore's—she of the incredible eyes and voice and the splendid repose that goes with authority.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 1, 1944

Miss Barrymore and Little Else

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE appearance of Ethel Barrymore on Broadway is always a pleasant occasion; but the pleasure this time is considerably diluted by the play, *Embezzled Heaven*, dramatized from the Franz Werfel novel, centers in a simple old servant who is an extremely devout daughter of the Church. Of the sincerity that went into creating the play there can be no doubt, and with the values—of faith and love—that it exalts there can be no cavilling. Even on the religious side, however, one must confess that the play's atmosphere is one of too sweetly smelling incense, and that its tone is one of piety that degenerates into preaching. But beyond that, and more seriously, *Embezzled Heaven* has grave weaknesses as drama. Even at its best—during the prologue and the first act—it succeeds in being agreeable at the cost of being too pretty and unreal; it seems like one of those Daudet stories that are part of beginners' French. After that, moreover, the idyllic atmosphere dissolves into pure unreality; into scenes that simply don't come off, and into a final scene at the Vatican that—whatever force it may have possessed in Werfel's novel — seems merely mawkish and dull.

* * *

Teta, the old servant, has given her savings to educate her nephew for the priesthood, hoping that—whatever her sins—from this act she may be sure of heaven. The nephew, a thorough scamp, hoodwinks her for years into believing he is a priest; actually he has never even been ordained. When she learns this, Teta feels sure she has lost all hope of Heaven. At Rome, however, whither she goes as part of a pilgrimage, she learns otherwise. Though she has been wrong, the Pope tells her, to suppose she could buy her way into Heaven, through the love and piety she has shown she is sure of a place there. And in this moment of happiness, the old woman dies.

There are many specific defects in the play—the scene between Teta and her nephew, which is so hopelessly written that Eduard Franz has no choice but to ham; the tedious flimflam at the beginning of Act III over whether the Pope will appear; and great chunks of the writing, which consists of literary language rather than human words. But the over-all defect is that *Embezzled Heaven* has mistaken sugariness for simplicity. It is never easy to portray the simple heart; only Flaubert, perhaps, has ever wholly managed it. But it is not necessary to prettify and devitalize it, as this play has done.

* * *

That the role of the old cook does not come off is not Miss Barrymore's fault. It may be that, she being Miss Barrymore, there is more of the great lady than of the servant in her Teta; but the role is so passive that we can be glad she gives it that much character. She, who abounds in personality, should not in any case be asked to lend herself to picturesqueness. She cannot make the role real, even though she painstakingly subdues herself to it; but she makes it interesting because she is interesting.

Making his Broadway debut as the Pope, the famous European Albert Basserman has no opportunity to reveal how good an actor he may be. He has merely a speaking part, not an acting one; and for this his accent is not an asset. In smaller roles, there are nice performances by Bettina Cerf and Martin Blaine; and Wolfe Barzell does well enough in the role of a very old Jew, though I thoroughly disliked the role. Stewart Chaney has designed the sets; that of a castle kitchen is excellent, and much the best of the three.

THE NEW YORK SUN
November 1, 1944

Ethel Barrymore Brings Distinction to 'Embezzled Heaven,' Fragile Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ETHEL BARRYMORE returned to Broadway last night to give a beautiful performance in "Embezzled Heaven," a play that has both dignity and feeling but that provides a singularly passive evening in the theater. The Theater Guild, making its start for the new season, presents it at the National.

Miss Barrymore, after all those months and all that mileage as the school teacher in "The Corn Is Green," is now a simple-hearted Czecho-Slovakian cook who yearns for a place in Heaven and seeks to buy her way there. The role is not as strong as that which she had in the Emlyn Williams play, but to it Miss Barrymore brings distinction. It's a performance that will give playgoers abundant reason to rediscover 41st Street.

This new drama, fashioned by L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay from the novel of Frank Werfel, which has been staged by B. Iden Payne and handsomely produced by the Theater Guild, tells the story of Teta, the humble cook, who educates her nephew for the priesthood so that he may, through his prayers, pave her way into Heaven. For twenty-five years she toils, keeping him constantly supplied with money. But the nephew runs away from the theological school, is never ordained, and turns out to be a fraud. A young village priest in Moravia comes to Teta's aid, and in him she finds the qualities she had expected in her nephew. Together they go on a pilgrimage to Rome. Teta gets an audience with the Pope, and before she dies she is given the promise of his prayers.

Miss Barrymore's co-players include Albert Basserman, celebrated German actor, making his debut in an English-speaking role; Eduard Franz, Sanford Meisner and Martin Blaine. Mr. Basserman gives dignity and humanity to the role of the Pope. Mr. Frank contributes a colorful performance as the rascally nephew who has become a fortune teller in a village carnival, after systematically robbing his trusting aunt by mail for years Mr. Blaine is excellent as the young village priest, and there is an amusing performance from Wolfe Barzell, playing a cackling village gossip, aged 99.

It's a costly and tasteful production that the Guild has given the National's new play. Stewart Chaney designed it and his third act setting, that of the reception hall in the Vatican, is a striking one. It's my impression that B. Iden Payne, who has been Miss Barrymore's director on other occasions, has done a creditable job in the staging.

"Embezzled Heaven" is a fragile play. A very languid one, in fact. It is lacking in sustained vitality and its material is skimpy for three acts. But Ethel Barrymore's presence gives it importance. She is fascinating to watch and her voice holds playgoers in its spell, just as it has been doing for all these years.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 1, 1944

Ethel Barrymore's Embezzled Heaven

By BURTON RASCOE

I AM sorry, but, although The, by long-odds, First Lady of the Theater—Ethel Barrymore — is in Embezzled Heaven, which opened last night at the National, these thumbs must be down on it. It has some interesting sets, by Stewart Chaney, and Miss Barrymore, as always, is a pleasure to listen to and to watch; but the play, to put it quite simply, is pointless and a bore.

The story is this: A Czechoslovakian spinster, who is a wonderful cook in the home of the Countess Argan, has only one ambition in life, and that is for one of her own kin, as a priest, to pray her into heaven; she sends her savings for 25 years to her nephew, a scoundrel, believing all the time that she is educating him for the priesthood, and that the money he constantly demands is for missionary work, until he asks for a large sum for improvements of the parish church of which, he says, he has just been made curate; she arrives there to hear him say his first mass only to learn that he is not a priest but a free-thinking astrologer and fortune-teller with a pitch in a roving street carnival; she joins in a pilgrimage to Rome and gains audience with the Pope, who hears her story and gives her his blessings just before she dies in the arms of the parish priest who promises to pray for her salvation.

The play is by L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay, from a novel by Franz Werfel.

In all conscience I can't see how Embezzled Heaven can possibly do anything to propagate the faith of the Catholic Church, even though that is Herr Doktor Werfel's intention; for there is no point, dramatic or religious, to the story. Even in what should have been the big scene (and Mr. Chaney certainly cooked up a set for it), where the humble servant (Miss Barrymore) gains audience with the Servant of the Servants of God (Albert Basserman) all you have is a silly, deluded old woman kindly pitied in her aberration by a mortally ailing and indulgent Pope.

Miss Barrymore takes care of herself on any stage and she is always magnificent; so she probably wasn't restricted by any direction by B. Iden Payne, whose notions about how to stage a play seem to have been modeled on the technique of the old "living sculpture" tableau. The action is jerky static and two-dimensional; and even such excellent players as Eduard Franz and Albert Basserman are made to seem like marionnettes.

"Embezzled Heaven"—continued

THE NEW YORK TIMES
November 1, 1944

'Embezzled Heaven'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ETHEL Barrymore has been absent from Broadway for too long a time, as for the past several seasons she has conducted Miss Moffat's classroom across the country in "The Corn Is Green." Now she is back, and that fact indeed supplies good news. If this morning's note could stop there, all would be well. Unfortunately it cannot, however, for the play in which the head of the theatre's royal family arrived at the National last evening is far from a good one; its talents do not match those of the leading lady. Derived from Franz Werfel's "Embezzled Heaven," and staged impressively by the Guild, it still lacks the substance of the best theatre.

* * *

"Embezzled Heaven" teaches that heaven is arrived at through faith and love, and not by plan. Its chief character is a Czech cook, who sends money to her nephew in the belief that he will study for the priesthood, and thus her way to salvation will be paved by a "private priest." He is a swindler who ends as the fortune teller in a carnival, at the same time telling the cook he has become a village priest. She goes to live with him, is befriended by the real priest, and during a pilgrimage to Rome is told the truth of a hope of salvation by the Pope. She dies at the end of the audience.

"Embezzled Heaven" is a play of mood, and its action is slight; its fulfillment must depend on the characters. In making the adaptation, L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay seem to have been a little indecisive about shaping the figures. As they have created the part of Teta, the cook, they have not managed to combine the two sides of her character—the schemer for heaven and the simple woman of great faith. In truth, Miss Barrymore has not managed this entirely, either. A fair number of the characters lack flesh-and-blood reality, and a number of them—notably the dishonest nephew — are almost in caricature. The play's ending—the death scene of Teta—is maudlin in the theatre's worst way.

The play could have been a pilgrimage whereby Teta — as representative of simple faith everywhere—learned her lesson of salvation. But where it should sing, it sometimes plods. Where its characters should be human ones, they often are simply the product of an adaptor's art. Although because of the theme they could be more universal than those of Mr. Werfel's "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," Teta and the others are not nearly as real. "Embezzled Heaven" ends with giving the feeling of great promises but little actual reward.

* * *

Although Miss Barrymore always is brilliant on any stage, Teta is not the part by which she will be most remembered. To act Teta completely probably would be impossible, and there may be a question as to whether Miss Barrymore is quite simple enough for the aging cook, or scheming enough for that side of Teta which is trying bribery into heaven. Making his first appearance on the Broadway stage, Albert Basserman has the role of the Pope. His accent is a little difficult, and he has one or two continental mannerisms, but he plays the role with dignity and sincerity. Sanford Meisner and Eduard Franz tend to go through their parts a bit too brightly; Martin Blaine is good as the village priest, and so is Bettina Cerf as the Countess for whom Teta works. Stewart Chaney has provided completely lavish settings.

"No Way Out"

Play by Owen Davis; staged by Robert Keith and Mr. Davis; settings by Edward Gilbert. Presented by Mr. Keith at the Cort Theatre, October 30, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 31, 1944

Owen Davis' Latest Lively Melodrama

By BURTON RASCOE

NO WAY OUT, by Owen Davis, which Robert Keith presented at the Cort last night, is a very adroitly written melodrama, with a tensely suspenseful third act. It is, theatrically, old fashioned and not a play for sophisticates (the hardened first-nighters didn't cotton to it much last night) but it is something I enjoyed, in spite of one or two crudities, and I think the average playgoer will find it quite satisfying entertainment.

You readily guess not only the murderer but his motive, even before he appears in the first act. Mr. Davis, the author, has taken pains that you should. His problem, then, as a playwright, is to hold your interest to the end, even though you are pretty sure how it is going to come out. He is an old hand at melodrama, having written about 300 of them, and knows all the tricks of outguessing the audience just enough, from scene to scene, to keep its curiosity in a state of excited interest.

Keith as Menace

Mr. Keith, who was only lately being extremely funny in Kiss and Tell, in producing this play has cast himself as the menace, and an excellent bit of casting it is; for he always turns in a good performance, whether as a heavy, as a comic or in a straight role. He also helped Mr. Davis direct the play, and between them they have done an expert job for the sort of thing No Way Out is. There is no artificial excitement, no rain-storms, no meller claptrap. It is all fairly credible, subdued and polite. The suspense is sustained by the undertone, which is cleverly managed.

The story is simple. Dr. Hilliard, a brilliant, charming and fashionable physician, having murdered the wealthy husband of his mistress by the simple trick of withholding the medication which would have cured the patient, and having married the widow, has not only run through her fortune (without her knowledge) in his secret passion for gambling, but is being so hard pressed to cover his gambling losses that he is killing his step-daughter (who has a large inheritance) by omitting the insulin treatment for Addison's disease, which is wasting her away.

THE CAST

Cora Hilliard	Viola Frayne
Dr. Enid Karley	Irene Hervey
Bob Karley	Jerome P. Thor
Barbara Trent	Nancy Marquand
Napoleon	John Marriott
Molly Levenseller	Viola Roache
Dr. Walter Levenseller	Donald Foster
Hesther Darrow	Jean Casto
Dr. Nils Hilliard	Robert Keith
Jim Slade	Maurice Burke

Much Suspense

Mr. Davis, by the way, is very naive about stock market operations (to which he attributes the gambling losses of Dr. Hilliard) and about the character and business methods of brokers. He seems to have confused them with the gangsters he has seen depicted in the movies. He imagines that when the stocks carried by a broker in a customer's account drop below the margin requirements the broker calls on the customer and threatens blackmail and/or sudden death, if he doesn't come across with a big hunk of money (in this case $24,000) right away. That's a strange idea for Mr. Davis to have. But this nonsense constitutes only a minor error and does furnish urgency in Dr. Hilliard's motive for murdering his step-daughter.

The drama centers upon the mental duel between Dr. Hilliard and a young woman doctor (Irene Hervey), who is a guest in the house and whose brother is engaged to the heiress. She has correctly diagnosed (by observation) the nature of the girl's illness, and her suspicions are gradually aroused by Dr. Hilliard's attitude; but professional ethics, at first, estop her from openly questioning Dr. Hilliard's handling of the case. He is unmasked in the end, of course, but this takes quite a bit of doing, and it had me on the edge of my seat in the last act.

The cast is attractive and skilful. Aside from Mr. Keith, highest honors go to Irene Hervey, who makes her debut on Broadway after a stretch in stock and in the movies, to Barbara Trent as the young victim of her adored step-father's machinations, and to Donald Foster as the psychiatrist friend of the family. No Way Out is a much sounder melodrama, technically speaking, and, I think, better theater than The Two Mrs. Carrolls, which has been running over a year. It had one awful gaff last night—"You are a hard man; but I'd go to hell with you"—spoken by Dr. Hilliard's mistress-nurse. It provoked guffaws and titters. No doubt it will be cut before the next performance.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 31, 1944

'No Way Out' a Sleepy Drama About Two M.D.'s and a Disease

By JOHN CHAPMAN

DOCTORS are very interesting people—when they are your own. When one finds them on the stage, however, they and the mechanics of their trade usually become dull. In "No Way Out" the veteran Owen Davis has written a drama about a three-cornered fracas between two doctors and Addison's disease, and the best an audience can get out of it is a mild dose of lethargic encephalitis, or sleeping sickness.

According to the program, note at the Cort Theatre last night, Mr. Davis though this one up while he was in a hospital recovering from an operation. An apparently healthy and undoubtedly experienced actor, Robert Keith, bought it, produced it and directed it, with himself as one of the doctors.

The other medic is Irene Hervey. She and Keith come to grips over the health of Keith's step-daughter, an heiress. He is treating the lass for nausea, fainting fits and pallor when, according to Doc Hervey, he should be dosing her for Addison's disease. In other words, he is murdering his patient in a foolproof manner, and Miss Hervey is powerless to interfere because medical ethics hold than one physician can't poach on another's patient without being asked.

All of this is without tension and without climax. The only way you can tell when the play is over is that the curtain comes down. I am reminded, somehow, of another medical case — the guy with the hangover who was leading an eight-legged dragon down the street on a leash. The animal kept lifting three legs at every fire plug, and finally the exasperated owner jerked the leash and growled, "Come along, now, or I'll take an aspirin and you won't be here."

Maybe if Mr. Davis had taken an aspirin in the hospital there wouldn't have been any "No Way Out."

NEW YORK SUN
October 31, 1944

'No Way Out,' New Play by Owen Davis, Stolid and Old-fashioned Melodrama

By WARD MOREHOUSE

OWEN DAVIS, man of 300 (or more) plays, has written a stolid and plotty melodrama in "No Way Out," presented last evening at the Cort by Robert Keith. Mr. Keith has the leading role and also served as co-director with the author. I wish them both well, but the Cort's new piece is not anything to cheer about.

Mr. Davis has written on nearly every imaginable subject in forty odd years of playmaking and he now delves into the medical profession in "No Way Out," presenting the case of the brilliant but diabolical Dr. Hilliard, who is slowly murdering his young step-daughter, so as to come by funds which will presumably go to his wife in case of the daughter's death.

The doctor, you see, is in a bad way in the market and desperate action is necessary. He is thwarted, however, by a young woman physician, the pretty and astute Dr. Enid Karley, who challenges his diagnosis and exposes him just in time to save Barbara, who was a very sick girl all evening and was steadily getting worse.

The play is slow, it is indifferently acted, and Mr. Davis has written better dialogue in probably fifty other melodramas. His treatment is generally old-fashioned and one of his characters, the faithful colored servant, who has long suspected foul play, is out of the theater of a bygone day.

Robert Keith, a fortright performer in better roles, doesn't make the ruthless Dr. Hilliard convincing and I don't know of the actor who could. Irene Hervey is decorative but inexperienced as Dr. Karley, who saves young Barbara's life—and the day for the ethics and skill of the medical profession. The others go through the motions in very sketchy roles.

"No Way Out" does not show the estimable Mr. Davis in one of his adroit moods. It is even lacking in the jolt which I expected him to give it at the finish. It is not good theater; it is certainly not a good play.

Forty-eight Street's Drama Week is off to a poor start.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 31, 1944

Thirty Years Too Late

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

A MAN with as staggeringly many plays to his credit as Owen Davis can't help putting them together with a certain technical skill. His new work, *No Way Out*, keeps moving along on schedule from scene to scene. But a man who has had a hand in 300 plays can also hardly help putting them together more than a trifle mechanically, seizing without much thought on all the tricks of the trade. What is worse, he is apt to put them together more than a trifle outmodedly, unaware that the tricks have become the most mildewed of cliches and that even the dialogue may be covered with moss. *No Way Out*, in any case, smacks theatrically of the Dark Ages, or at least the gaslight era. The medical "problem" it revolves around may still have its jot of urgency, but the play itself seems as dated as leeches and cupping.

Mr. Davis—like Rose Franken last season in *Doctors Disagree* — has dramatized the dangers in the unwritten law that a doctor may not interfere in another doctor's case without that other doctor's consent. In *No Way Out*, the other doctor is not merely misguided, he is thoroughly unscrupulous, and for vicious reasons is allowing his step-daughter to die of Addison's disease. The setup, in other words, is too melodramatic to leave you in much suspense over the final outcome; the Marine—or at least the Medical Corps—are sure to rush in at the finish.

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No Way Out holds your interest in an elementary way; but that's all. As serious drama it's merely the bunk, and as melodrama it's too tame and old-fashioned to have any punch. The plot is fabricated, the characters are cut from whole cloth, and the dialogue is so stilted that far better actors than those at the Cort would have trouble getting it said. Mr. Davis may be a good carpenter, but his house has gone out of style; *No Way Out* is not for 1944.

The direction shows some effort at restraint, but the actors are pretty well hamstrung. Robert Keith plays the evil doctor with a certain forcefulness, and Irene Hervey is sincere (and pretty) as the good one. Nancy Marquand plays the sick girl as well as she can, which goes for the rest of the cast.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 31, 1944

'No Way Out' Opens At Cort Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

THEY do say that "No Way Out" is Owen Davis' three-hundred-and-first play. This three-hundred-and-first one is a medical melodrama with Addison's Disease as heroine. Not a happy heroine, I'm here to tell you, especially now that there're so many other things to grieve about in a war-torn, cockeyed world. But Addison's Disease she is, and, in the person of the Barbara Trent of Nancy Marquand, you have her with you at the Cort throughout a diagnostic evening.

Don't get me too wrong, now, "No Way Out," as produced by Robert Keith, and staged by Mr. Keith and Owen Davis against a spacious background by Edward Gilbert, is a sad and serious attempt to revive what once was known as the problem play. The problem here is ethics, doctorial ethics, with a ten-twent'-thirt'-undercurrent of good, old-fashioned Davisonian villainy. Maybe the time has come for such onstage resuscitations. But I honestly don't believe it.

"Barbara, the Beautiful Doomed One," might well have been the piece's title. Or "Doctor Hilliard's Secret."

Doctor Dastard

Even the Encyclopedia Britannica can't begin to tell you what "snafu" really means until you've caught up with last night's murderous medico. A physician of note with a shady past, a shady present and a shady future, he's up to his neck in nastiness. He has already done away with his wife's first husband and his wife's big bank account. And even as you meet him, he is doing away with his wife's young daughter. He is after his stepchild's legacy.

Urged on by his broker, to whom he is in debt, encouraged by his mistress, with whom he is in love, he does nothing whatever about the Addison's Disease with which our unhappy heroine is afflicted. With a couple of other doctors traipsing in and out of his living-room in a large city in northern New York State—they're a Dr. Karley, who is a lady, and a Dr. Levenseller, who is a gent—he pretends there's nothing seriously the matter with poor, dear Barbara Trent.

So he let's her die on her feet while his fellow physicians look on in helpless ethicality. She's his patient, not theirs!

Uncertain Ending

On second thought, perhaps she doesn't die; although, up to the fall of the final curtain, she has her hand on death's disastrous doorknob. This final curtain falls so suddenly, so unexpectedly, so prematurely that, as far as I'm concerned, the conclusion of "No Way Out" lives up to its title. Even now I can't make up my mind which gets poor, dear Barbara in the end—Addison's Disease or young Bob Karley, who's going off to the wars or something.

Robert Keith, after 16 months of hilarity in "Kiss and Tell," turns lugubrious on his many admiring customers, of whom I am most certainly one. Irene Hervey, a refugee from Hollywood, is a likely enough lady doctor. Nancy Marquand, whose Great Aunt Julia once understudied Lillian Russell, is sweet and sickly as the heroine with Addison's Disease. John Marriott is once more an ebony Napoleon, just as he was in "The Little Foxes" on stage and screen . . .

Programs point out that Owen Davis wrote "No Way Out" while convalescing in a hospital. I can well believe it.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 31, 1944

Doctor's Dilemma

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BEING a playwright with an extensive practice, Owen Davis is not a man to let the drama's raw material slip through his fingers. A bit back, while lying in the hospital, he began brooding about medical ethics, which is a normal bit of convalescence, and from this came a new play called "No Way Out." Mr. Davis recovered from his illness, which was all to the good and a great satisfaction to everyone in the theatre, but the by-product, as shown last night at the Cort, was not of the same standard as the cure. The latest play by the author of more than 300 of them is pretty old-fashioned and not a little creaky at the joints, and audiences of the autumn of 1944 may smile now and then where smiles are not intended.

In stating his worry over a tradition that has bothered a good many medical men as well as playwrights, Mr. Davis uses as his central figure a young girl who has a disease which can be cured. Her physician, who is also her stepfather, isn't particularly interested in the cure, and on the grounds of medical ethics, other doctors are frightened away from consultation. In "No Way Out" Mr. Davis really has two plays, one a legitimate discussion of ethics, the other a simple melodrama; and the two, like oil and water, do not mix so well. Medical practices and the descriptions thereof keep intruding on what might be a simple horror play, and the moments of normal melodrama end with little discussions almost formal enough for the academy of medicine. The dialogue is not good enough to carry the changes or put the play across.

Irene Hervey, more normally of the films, is quite attractive as a young woman physician who runs into the ethics of her profession, at least for melodrama. She has a quiet voice, is sincere and, through most of "No Way Out," is quite believable. Robert Keith, who also produced and co-directed with Mr. Davis, has a part which isn't well drawn; he is the physician of villainy, and no one could say soberly some of the things he must say. Jean Casto plays the part of a nurse, a weird character indeed, even for melodrama; and Nancy Marquand is the girl whose life is spared to the utter confusion of medical ethics. This time the operation was successful — but the play died.

NEW YORK POST
October 31, 1944

'This Way Out' Would Be A Better Title at the Cort

By WILELLA WALDORF

OWEN DAVIS, according to last night's program at the Cort Theatre, wrote "No Way Out" in a hospital while convalescing from an operation. No doubt he wasn't feeling any too well at the time, but that's hardly an excuse for exposing audiences to it in a Broadway theatre. He might have showed it to his doctor, who would doubtless have diagnosed an acute case of putrid playwriting and tossed it into the incinerator.

If professional ethics prevented the physician from telling his patient the painful truth, no such scruples need apply here. Mr. Davis, presumably, is out of the hospital now